

**A NEW DEAL FOR SOCIAL HOUSING
LIVERPOOL CITY REGION HOUSING
ASSOCIATION CUSTOMER FEEDBACK TO
THE HOUSING GREEN PAPER
OCTOBER 2018**

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1. Executive Summary

In response to the Government's green paper "A new deal for social housing", the housing associations in the Liverpool City Region (LCR) have collaborated on a joint response. As part of this submission, consultation has taken place with customers from a number of the partners to ensure that the tenant voice is reflected in our response to Government. The consultation took place using a variety of methods and was based around five key questions.

The questions were designed to test tenants' views about their perceptions regarding the responsiveness of their landlord and how they feel about being a social housing tenant. The profile of the replies was consistent both across organisations, and across geographical areas within the city region. The key highlights to the five questions are listed below:

- **Question 1** asked about whether tenants thought their landlord would listen to them if they raised a safety concern and 77% responded yes, they thought their landlord would listen. **Key message:** confidence in being listened to.
- **Question 2** asked if tenants a) knew how to make a complaint to their landlord and b) if they felt that their complaint would be resolved in a reasonable time. The response to a) was 84% but this dropped to 67% for part b). **Key message:** confidence in making the complaint but feel that this is then dealt with as a business process rather than listening to what the issue is actually about.
- **Question 3** asked if tenants felt that the resurrection of a national tenants' body would be useful and 75% responded with a positive. **Key message:** there would be more merit in a regional rather than national tenant body as there was a fear that London issues would dominate.
- **Question 4** asked if tenants felt that their opportunities were affected by being a social housing tenant and only 28% said yes. **Key message:** people make assumptions about social housing tenants, that they are poor and needy and of lesser standing than home owners.
- **Question 5** asked if people thought that there was more that landlords and government could do to deal with the negative views of social housing tenants portrayed in the media with 64% responding yes. **Key message:** vulnerable people are stigmatised and most social housing tenants are ordinary people who work, raise their families to have sound values and are no different to occupiers of other tenures.

The views of customers are in line with the thinking from the housing associations, and the synergy of their views with those of their landlords has been reflected in the submission.

2. Background

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) released their Social Housing Green Paper entitled “A New Deal for Social Housing” for consultation.

At the LCR Chief Executive’s forum, a decision was made to submit a single response on behalf of partners and, in addition, that there should be consultation with customers in order to include the voice of our tenants in that submission. Plus Dane Housing has led this consultation and co-ordinated responses from partners around the region. In addition, Steve Biko Housing Association has led a joint diversity consultation to ensure that the voice of BME, disabled and LGTBQ tenants is heard and reflected in the submission.

In total responses were received from eight partners and those responses are included in this report. Those who contributed are:

- Halton Housing
- Liverpool Mutual Homes
- Magenta Living
- Onward
- Plus Dane
- Prima
- South Liverpool Housing
- Torus

Riverside engaged with Plus Dane having carried out a bespoke consultation with their own customers, and Steve Biko Housing contributed the outcomes of their diversity consultation event.

3. Methodology

The housing green paper is divided into five chapters:

- Chapter 1 – Ensuring homes are safe and decent;
- Chapter 2 – Effective resolution of complaints;
- Chapter 3 – Empowering residents and strengthening the Regulator;
- Chapter 4 – Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities;
- Chapter 5 – Expanding supply and supporting home ownership.

The consultation concentrated on at least one question from each chapter with the exception of chapter five as the thrust of that section is more focused on specific questions to housing providers around their ability to deliver a greater supply. The number of questions was limited to six in order to maximise the potential for responses. These were shared with partners for them to engage with their own tenants through tried and tested engagement routes, in order to maximise the engagement process. This included a mixture of online methods, postal questionnaires, telephone calls and face to face interaction through focus groups and bespoke events.

In total 393 customers gave their responses to the questions, giving a broad spectrum of views across the region. An event was held to invite customers from an equalities background including disability, BME, trans, homeless and older people with a mix of male and female attendees. The views expressed by the participants in the diversity workshops are in line with the responses given by residents who replied through their own landlords' consultation mechanisms.

The tables below only provide the responses from the direct consultation that took place by providers with their own customers. The views from those attending the diversity focus group are included in the narrative but not in tables one or two below.

Once the various consultations had taken place, the results were shared with Plus Dane in order to co-ordinate the joint response. This report presents a summary of the consultation as a whole, outlining the key themes from customers of the social housing providers in the region and the topics that have been included in the final submission to government.

4. Questions

The questions posed were standardised across all partners to ensure that the themes derived from the responses would be able to be analysed together. There was a link between the questions asked and the chapters of the Green Paper as demonstrated below:

- **Question 1** – Following the Grenfell fire the importance of listening to tenants who have concerns about the safety of their home has been highlighted. If you reported any concerns you have about the safety of your home to your landlord are you confident you would be listened to? (**Chapter 1**)
- **Question 2** – All social landlords have to have a formal process to allow customers to make a complaint. Are you confident you know:
 - a) How to make a complaint to your landlord?
 - b) That your complaint will be dealt with in a reasonable time and will be resolved? (**Chapter 2**)
- **Question 3** – There used to be a national organisation for social housing tenants called the National Tenants' Voice which was abolished by the coalition government in 2010. Do you think that having a national organisation for tenants would improve how the government listens to tenants? (**Chapter 3**)
- **Question 4** – Do you feel that the fact you are a social housing tenant affects the opportunities that you and your family have? (**Chapter 4**)
- **Question 5** – Do you feel that there is more that your landlord and the government can do to tackle the negative view of social housing tenants that is shown in the media? (**Chapter 4**).

There was no question relating to chapter five as the topic of expanding supply and supporting home ownership is more aligned with financial and business decisions of individual organisations where comments relating to the stigma of social housing tenants would give richer insight to the views of our customers.

A summary of responses from across the region is shown below in table one showing the numbers of yes and no per question. Table two shows a break down by percentage for each question. Where the totals do not add up to 376 or 100% this is because respondents answered don't know, unsure or failed to respond.

Table one: summary of responses all partners

Question	Yes	No
Following the Grenfell fire the importance of listening to tenants who have concerns about the safety of their home has been highlighted. If you reported any concerns you have about the safety of your home to your landlord are you confident you would be listened to?	290	78
All social landlords have to have a formal process to allow customers to make a complaint. Are you confident you know: a) How to make a complaint to your landlord?	316	54
b) That your complaint will be dealt with in a reasonable time and will be resolved?	251	99
There used to be a national organisation for social housing tenants called the National Tenants' Voice which was abolished by the coalition government in 2010. Do you think that having a national organisation for tenants would improve how the government listens to tenants?	281	79
Do you feel that the fact you are a social housing tenant affects the opportunities that you and your family have?	106	264
Do you feel that there is more that your landlord and the government can do to tackle the negative view of social housing tenants that is shown in the media?	242	115

Table two: summary of all partner responses by percentage

Question	Yes	No
Following the Grenfell fire the importance of listening to tenants who have concerns about the safety of their home has been highlighted. If you reported any concerns you have about the safety of your home to your landlord are you confident you would be listened to?	77%	21%
All social landlords have to have a formal process to allow customers to make a complaint. Are you confident you know: a) How to make a complaint to your landlord?	84%	14%
b) That your complaint will be dealt with in a reasonable time and will be resolved?	67%	26%
There used to be a national organisation for social housing tenants called the National Tenants' Voice which was abolished by the coalition	75%	21%

government in 2010. Do you think that having a national organisation for tenants would improve how the government listens to tenants?		
Do you feel that the fact you are a social housing tenant affects the opportunities that you and your family have?	28%	70%
Do you feel that there is more that your landlord and the government can do to tackle the negative view of social housing tenants that is shown in the media?	64%	31%

Due to the differences in the sample size of each provider, direct conclusions would not provide a statistically valid narrative; therefore observations about trends are made as a true like for like comparison is not possible.

Customers generally felt that they would have confidence in being listened to if they raised any safety concerns, although only one landlord had 100% confidence of their tenants.

The majority of tenants knew how to make a complaint to their landlord, however their confidence that the complaint would be resolved and within a reasonable time shifted in all cases.

Views around the need for a national tenant body show an overwhelming majority of customers in favour. The narrative was more nuanced when customers explained their thinking and this is explored below.

Whether customers felt that they had reduced opportunities as a social housing tenant was seen as negative in all but one case. There was a strong sense of pride in being a tenant of a social landlord; however the comments below show a broader sense of frustration with societal views.

The question about whether there was more that could be done to tackle the negative portrayal of social housing in the media showed agreement across all partners. This question elicited the greatest response and some wide reaching views which are explored below.

5. Key themes

In addition to the Yes/No option for each question there was the opportunity to give further information after each question. There was a mixed response to this with some respondents choosing to expand on their answers where a significant proportion opted to simply answer yes or no.

When reviewing the opinions given by customers the themes are consistent across all landlords, there were no particular issues where tenants of one provider felt differently to their counterparts living in another landlords' property or between those tenants who attended the diversity focus group. The comments below are grouped according to themes by question with some quotes to provide validation.

Question 1 – Following the Grenfell fire the importance of listening to tenants who have concerns about the safety of their home has been highlighted. If you reported any concerns you have about the safety of your home to your landlord are you confident you would be listened to?

In general, people were complimentary about the staff that work for their landlord and gave examples of when staff had listened and of the action taken. There were some negative comments where people thought that they wouldn't be listened to but these were in the minority.

There were some comments about being listened to but then how long it took for repairs to be completed. There were also some individual examples of repairs being reported that have not been actioned to the satisfaction of the customer. There was a concern voiced that landlords should make sure their staff are properly trained in health and safety issues. Most of the comments were quite succinct and include the examples below.

“On my past experienceI feel I'm listened to”

“”have always had prompt action in the past”

“Yes, staff react quickly to this”

“it may take a couple of emails or phone calls but I am confident that it would be addressed”

“I have reported problems in the past which have been sorted”

Question 2 – All social landlords have to have a formal process to allow customers to make a complaint. Are you confident you know a) how to make a complaint to your landlord and b) that your complaint will be dealt with in a reasonable time and will be resolved?

The general theme from this question is that customers do know how to make a complaint to their landlord and that on the whole it will be responded to, although there were some comments about the time it might take and the quality of the response to address the issue. There were comments that landlords would listen but not always tackle the underlying issue, rather being more concerned with dealing with the complaint itself. Generally it was thought that it was more important to keep the tenant informed through the process rather than being concerned about rigid timescales. Also it was noted that a customer may know how to complain but not about the stages or processes surrounding the complaint system.

Customers from a number of landlords made reference to reporting anti-social behaviour and made comments (both positive and negative) about the response to these reports. This has been highlighted as landlords will rarely class a report of anti-social behaviour as a “complaint” and will neither categorise it or process the report in line with the complaint process but will enact their procedures for dealing with anti-social behaviour. This would seem to be a good example of landlords not

appreciating the way that their customers class an issue and the potential for then being seen not to respond in an appropriate manner. Below is a sample of comments about making a complaint.

“My landlord is very approachable”

“I don’t escalate an issue if I am not happy with the response”

“Happy that landlord listens but does not always act on what they hear”

“I believe staff are primed to respond to complaints quickly but they are not invested in long term solutions”

“It takes too long going back and forth with staff”

“People know how to complain but not necessarily the stages of complaint”

Question 3 – There used to be a national organisation for social housing tenants called the national Tenants’ Voice which was abolished by the coalition government in 2010. Do you think that having a national organisation for tenants would improve how government listens to tenants?

There was a mixed view from customers about the merits of having a national tenant body. Although the responses to the yes/no question gave a clear view that this would be a positive development, the narrative provided was not as clear cut. However there were some clear points that were made across all landlords.

The first is that there is a great deal of scepticism about the government and their will to listen to a body that represents tenants. For those in favour there was a belief that there was a benefit to a collective voice rather than individuals trying to campaign or get a point across.

Several tenants suggested that a regional organisation could be more effective than a national one due to the fear that the voices of those in London and the South East was louder and more influential than the rest of the country.

“Don’t think the Government could care less about social housing they are all very fortunate wealthy people who will never experience hardship”

“I have said YES to this question but I don’t think the Government would listen to what we want”

“The Government will do what they want”

“I don’t believe the current government wishes to listen,”

“One large voice is better than several small ones”

“Many voices are better than a few”

“Banding together, you need a group one on their own is no good”

“We need a regional body – national wouldn’t work”

“..it would be South East biased”

“needs to be regional due to geographical and demographic differences”

“as long as it is based in a community and not in London”

“tenants may pay more for rent than a homeowner pays for a mortgage so why not the right to be heard”

Question 4 – Do you feel that the fact you are a social housing tenant affects the opportunities that you and your family have?

Many people felt proud to be social housing tenants, that opportunity was there, and it is up to individuals to make their own way. One customer said that they felt that being a social housing tenant affects opportunities in a positive way as the rent would always be affordable and there would never be an unexpected bill for repairs, therefore they are secure to plan for other expenses. However, there were other people who talked about the stigma felt from employers and in relation to securing financial services. There were remarks that sometimes the issues are around disadvantaged neighbourhoods and issues of poverty beyond tenants’ control.

One issue that was raised that should be of concern to partners is the view that our own staff can treat people as tenants and perpetuate the feelings of stigma for our customers.

“the local area is more of an issue than my landlord”

“Society assumes you are poor and needy”

“employers think we are a thief, thug, drug dealer or addict!”

“People assume you have a “tenant mentality” whatever that is”

“People think we are scumbags”

“We are often treated as second class citizens”

“social housing tends to be in poorer areas with fewer jobs and poorer education standards”

“affluent homeowners are deemed as well educated law abiding citizens!!”

“The stigma not only comes from employers but from the workforce employed by

xx”

Question 5 – Do you feel that there is more that your landlord and the government can do to tackle the negative view of social housing tenants that is shown in the media?

This question experienced the greatest number of responses across the board and there was significant cross over with the topics covered in the previous question. There were strong views that the media presented images of social housing tenants as unemployed, with addictions and an inability to behave correctly. There was some resignation that the media played to this stereotype either for political or commercial reasons – negative images sell programmes and newspapers. Some comments suggested that the government should play a role in preventing the negative images of social housing that are portrayed in the media including the strengthening of the code of conduct for broadcasters and journalists. There was a view expressed that the language used in the Green Paper reinforced stigma in a number of ways, most particularly when using patronising language such as “we want to celebrate the role of residents in shaping fantastic places...”.

Views were expressed around the perceived supremacy of homeownership from the perspective that the emphasis and obsession with homeownership as the tenure that everyone should aspire as being derogatory to those who rent, but also that the government should do more to help those who are struggling to buy if that is what they believe to be the “norm”.

The role of tenants in helping to combat negative stigma was raised as well as the landlord and the government. The supply of housing and the lack of new social homes being built was put forward as a reason why stigma was acute – some feel that social housing is no longer widely perceived as the tenure for poorer working families.

There were a number of comments made about the term social housing and that continuing to use that as a label perpetuates stigma as well as highlighting the role our staff play in reinforcing the negative view. One person suggested renaming it “sociable housing”.

“Show the positive side not just drugs alcohol and poverty. We work and look after our house”

“there is an assumption that we are unemployed”

“we actually work and bring our children up with good sound values and care about their futures”

“focus on tenants that smoke and drink .. while discussing financial problems .. not all social landlord tenants smoke and drink but still have financial problems”

“the propaganda is stigmatising vulnerable people”

“don’t class us all in one bracket”

“there should be national equivalence between social and private housing like France and Germany”

“the homeowners on the new estate opposite felt that we didn’t deserve to have our houses as we are low lives”

“staff need to understand that many tenants are in work and are not ill-educated. Much more needs to be done by landlords in offering a high standard of respectful customer service”

“there is a danger that landlords take their eye off the ball and lose their social purpose and are forced down a commercial road ... Government should be there for the landlord”

In conclusion to the topic of stigma, one customer summed up the way forward as “listen to us and work with us”.

6. Conclusion

The views given by the 393 residents of social housing across the city region who participated in the consultation exercise have been incorporated into the joint submission to government. The themes and views expressed show synergy with the response from the housing providers and the voice of our customers has been woven through the response to emphasise or clarify particular points. The quotes used are all directly transcribed from the responses from customers and demonstrate how clearly people were able to articulate their views about living in social housing.

This consultation exercise has equipped us with some valuable insight into the perception that tenants have about their ability to be heard by landlords, and it will be important to act on this.